

# PRACTICAL REMARKS ON PRAYER

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BY

E. J. THOMAS

'Golden bowls full of incense which are the  
prayers of the saints.' Revelation v. 8

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## PREFACE

THESE pages do not assume to be a complete treatment of the deep and blessed theme of prayer, but it is hoped that they may assist in the understanding, and in the exercise, of that exalted and precious privilege.

At the risk of discursiveness, a number of miscellaneous points are dealt with, on which the explanations submitted may perhaps not be unacceptable.

The translations of Scripture used, are the Authorised Version, the Revised Version, and the 'New Translation.' (J. N. Darby's.)

May He who delights to hear His children's prayers, deign to use this little book, for their comfort and assistance.

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# PRACTICAL REMARKS ON PRAYER

## CHAPTER I

### THE EXPRESSION OF DEPENDENCE

How blessed is the subject of prayer! And if scripture research can assist the tried and buffeted saint to a better understanding of its principles, and how to utilise it more fully in daily difficulties, how welcome such a result! Let us, then, seek to enter upon the observation of some of the teachings of scripture on this subject.

First—PRAYER IS THE LANGUAGE OF REQUEST ADDRESSED TO GOD. It is important to distinguish between prayer and worship, though they may both be found together in the same address to God. In worship, we give something to God—our thanksgiving, praise, or adoration.

‘Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.’ (Heb. xiii. 15.)

Praise, then, is an offering, but prayer is a request. The common phrase ‘offering a prayer’ is therefore a mistake. We may offer worship, praise, adoration, thanksgiving. Prayer, however, is not an offering to God, but a request of something *from* Him.

Secondly—PRAYER IS THE EXPRESSION OF DEPENDENCE. Dependence is the due attitude of the creature towards the Creator. God alone is sufficient to Himself. Every creature, whether he know it or not, is really dependent; and prayer, in its foundation principle, is the expression of this dependence: to acknowledge it, is to live in truth; to deny it—to live the prayerless life—is to walk in darkness. Man, as revolted, has lost the sense of dependence upon his Creator. He has slipped his moorings, got away from moral connection with the blessed Centre of the universe, and, wandering in sin and darkness, thinks it the finest and grandest thing to be independent. This, the very principle of his life, is a falsity; he 'maketh a lie' (Rev. xxi. 27), and loses that true blessedness, enjoyment of the creature's happy and proper position before his Maker.

It was to a new feature, therefore, in the life of Saul of Tarsus that the Lord directed the attention of Ananias, when, sending him to Saul, He said, 'Arise, and go . . . and enquire . . . for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth.' (Acts ix. 11.) Here was a remarkable thing. Yesterday he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter; now he is upon his knees. Man, in this instance, had got back to his bearings; the creature was humbled before, and reconciled to, his Creator. Thus, prayer is one of the earliest, truest instincts of divine life in man; and in this view it may be said that the first genuine breathing of the soul to God is the beginning of an eternal communion. A stream has started which will flow, and flow for ever—like the water which Christ gives the soul, and which is in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Not that



this communion or intercourse will always have the character of prayer—that is the form which it takes from the nature of the scene where it occurs—a world of sin and of necessities. In the future scene the language of dependence will not be that of request, for satisfaction will have taken the place of need, and every vessel will be full. As is often sung,

‘Hope shall change to glad fruition,  
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.’

But in the present time, and in the place where we are, dependence, really felt, expresses itself in prayer. To be dependent on one who is capricious, or ill-willed, is misery; but to be dependent upon God, whose nature is love, and whose power is limitless—this is happiness!

## CHAPTER II

### THE LORD JESUS A MAN OF PRAYER

THE blessed Son of God, when becoming a man, though not Himself a creature, took so fully man's place of dependence that we find He prayed habitually.

'Cold mountains and the midnight air,  
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer.'

Beautiful indication are the prayers of Jesus of the reality of His manhood—He kneels down and prays. Pre-eminent in all things, He is an example in this. So He entered upon His ministry with prayer. And may we not say, as a canon of Christian life, WHAT IS BEGUN WITH PRAYER WILL END IN PRAISE? It was when praying thus at His baptism that the heavens were opened to Jesus. (Luke iii. 21.) Prior to choosing apostles He spent the night in prayer to God. (Luke vi. 12, 13.) Again, in Luke ix. 18, we find Him 'alone praying.' It was 'as He prayed' on the mount of Transfiguration that the fashion of His countenance was altered and He received from God the Father honour and glory. He did not go up to the mountain to be glorified; He went up 'to pray,' and was glorified. The object was prayer, the result was glory. (Luke ix. 28, *et seq.*)

The principal recorded instances of the Lord's praying appear to be :

1. At His Baptism . . . . . Luke iii. 21.
2. On the first great spread of His fame . . . . . Mark i. 35; Luke v. 15, 16.
3. Before choosing the Apostles . . . . . Luke vi. 12, 13.
4. After feeding the Five Thousand . . . . . Matt. xiv. 23; Mark vi. 46.
5. At the virtual crisis of His testimony, when He forbids His being announced as Messiah, and predicts His death . . . . . Luke ix. 18.
6. At the transfiguration . . . . . Luke ix. 28.
7. Occasion not mentioned . . . . . Luke xi. 1.
8. At the raising of Lazarus . . . . . John xi. 41, 42
9. In view of His death . . . . . John xii. 27, 28.
10. His wonderful prayer to the Father, 'The hour is come.' . . . . John xvii.
11. Intercession for Peter . . . . . Luke xxii. 32.
12. Gethsemane . . . . . Matt. xxvi. 36-44; Mark xiv. 35-39; Luke xxii. 41-45.
13. Intercession for His murderers . . . . . Luke xxiii. 34.
14. At death, commending His spirit to the Father . . . . . Luke xxiii. 46.

We see then, that when, in the maturity of manhood having patiently passed thirty years in privacy, He is at last about to enter on the momentous undertaking of His life, He does so with prayer.

'And it came to pass, all the people having been baptized, and Jesus having been baptized *and praying*, that the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him; and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight. (Luke iii. 21, 22, New Translation.)

Following this, He is subjected to the temptation—the Spirit, who has just descended upon Him, leading Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Emerging victorious, He now, under the Baptist's testimony, becomes the *centre of gathering*, calling upon men to *follow Him* (Luke v. 11, 27; John i. 43), and exercising authority in bestowing a name upon one of them (John i. 42). He thus formally begins His work and testimony. So far, however, the work is in His own hands alone; the campaign is opened,

but is only in its first stage. The field is white unto harvest. Then an important development takes place. There is a night of prayer.

'And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued *all night in prayer to God.*'  
(Luke vi. 12.)

The result of this exercise is seen. When it is day He assembles His disciples, and out of them selects twelve to be apostles. He is already Centre of gathering, now He becomes Source of mission. The work widens, and He employs others under Him to carry the testimony throughout the land. Thus, in the record of the Lord's life great occasions are signalised, or brought about, by special prayer. Not only, however, did the Lord pray specially at special crises, but He had a practice: He would go, distinctly, and on purpose, to pray. Thus,

'And when he had sent the multitudes away,  
he went up into a mountain apart to pray.' Matt. xiv. 23.

'And it came to pass, as he was alone praying,'  
'And it came to pass about eight days  
after these sayings, he . . . went up into  
a mountain to pray.' Luke ix. 18, 28.

'He went, *as he was wont*, to the mount of  
Olives . . . and kneeled down and prayed.' Luke xxii. 39, 41.

Shall we not be gently led by so sweet an example? He had not where to lay His head—but with Him the solitudes of the mountain served for the walls of a closed chamber; and thus, is it not true with regard to prayer, that 'Where there is a will, there is a way'?

The Lord is never recorded as praying *with* His disciples. He taught them to pray. He prayed about them, prayed for them, not with them.\* For His own

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\* See Luke iii. 21; v. 16; vi. 12; ix. 29; xi. 1; xxii. 40, 41.

position was unique. Our prayers are on the basis of what Christ is for us. He could draw near to God, as qualified in His own person and dignity; we, only in His name. This explains a verse which otherwise would seem a contradiction. 'As he was alone praying, his disciples were with him.' (Luke ix. 18). The disciples were there, but *He* was 'alone praying.' And in Gethsemane He told the disciples to pray; but He, to pray, withdrew from them about a stone's cast. (Luke xxii. 40, 41.) This is important, as everything is which affects our thoughts about Christ. Christians sometimes speak of the Lord as 'Our Elder Brother,' Scripture never does. 'Ye call me Master and Lord,' He says, 'and ye say well, for so I am.' One has even heard Him addressed in prayer as 'Dear Lord'—a familiarity which is certainly not quite reverent. We cannot exaggerate the grace of Christ towards us, but it has been well said that:

'The personal dignity of Christ is never lost in the intensity and tenderness of His love. True saints among the Moravians have called Jesus 'Brother,' and others have borrowed their hymns, or the expression. The word never says so. *He is not ashamed* to call us brethren, but it is quite another thing for us to call Him so.' \*

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\* Darby. *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, Vol. III., p. 558, 2nd Ed.

## CHAPTER III

### PROMISES TO PRAYER

THE promises to prayer, of which the following are some of the more prominent, are, in general, dependent on specified conditions :—

- (1) 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive' . . . . . Matt. xxi. 22.
- (2) 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you' . . . . . John xv. 7.
- (3) 'Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight' . . . . . 1 John iii. 21, 22.
- (4) 'If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us, and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him' . . . . . 1 John v. 14, 15.
- (5) 'Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus' . . . . . Phil. iv. 6, 7.
- (6) 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' . . . . . Matt. xviii. 19, 20.
- (7) 'Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith

- shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" James v. 14, 15.
- (8) 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you' John xiv. 13, 14; xv. 16; xvi. 23.

## I

THE CONDITION ATTACHED to the first of the foregoing is believing. It will be said that believing, or faith, is necessary to all prayer. Though this is true, Scripture recognises specific faith about a specific thing. Thus one of the subjects of the miracles had faith to be healed \* (Acts xiv. 9); and it is expressly taught in 1 Cor. xii. 9 that there is a distinct spiritual gift of faith which some have, and some have not—a gift alluded to in chap. xiii. where Paul corrects the tendency to glory in gifts.

'Though I have all *faith*, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.' (1 Cor. xiii. 2.)

It is perhaps to this special character of faith that the Lord refers when He says,

'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' (Mark xi. 24.)

Genuine, divinely-given faith, not mystical or fancied faith, is what is here meant. Probably many have experimented upon this promise, only to be disappointed. Mahomet, it is said, audaciously commanded a mountain to come to him, and when his folly was manifest to all, tried to evade humiliation by saying, 'If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the mountain.' But the promises

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\* Not that faith was always required in the subject of a miracle, far from it.

of God, and the power of His Spirit, are not bestowed to be the subject of curious experiment, or the means of subserving private ends.

Further, the application of some of the promises in the Gospels was primarily to the apostles, however much the principle of them may extend to the humblest disciple. Take, for example, the promise we are considering. This, as well as the parallel passage in Mark xi., stands in relation to the incident of the barren fig-tree. The fig-tree was a type of Israel, to whom the Lord had come seeking fruit but finding none. He pronounced it fruitless for ever. That is a picture of Israel after the flesh, producing only the leaves of profession. Any fruit-bearing must be from the living One—'From me is thy fruit found.' In connection with this the Lord says,

'Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' (Matt. xxi. 21, 22.)

Now as the fig-tree symbolized Israel in the character of fruit-bearer, so 'mountain' here represents Israel as a political system, and accordingly, as an answer to the faith of the apostles, Israel has been cast into the sea of the nations, and politically lost.

Still the promise in all its fulness is there, for faith to act upon. It is a large one, and its only limit is the reality of the faith which employs it. If God give faith, He will as certainly give that to which the faith extends.

## II

THIS PROMISE, If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be



done unto you (John xv. 7), is equally large, and probably also meant for the apostles primarily—though the general principle may be applicable to all. But the limitation is a moral one. Even apostles, to whom the mighty work of inaugurating Christianity was entrusted, could not exercise their great powers as mere power—that is, apart from moral principle and purpose. Paul, for example, with all his powers of healing, says, ‘Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.’ (2 Tim. iv. 20.) Epaphroditus again, was sick nigh unto death (Phil. ii. 25-30) and this through his zealous service to the Lord (ver. 30) yet Paul does not interfere miraculously with the course of Nature. These instances may well encourage the Christian to be patient and submissive under sickness. God had His own purpose in these afflictions, a purpose which might have been marred by the uncalled-for interposition of a miracle. And on Paul’s part, his powers of miracles were not given him to be used at random, or at his own will, but in the service of his Master.

So also with the church at Corinth. They came behind in no gift; they had miracles and gifts of healing; yet under God’s chastening hand—not to be interfered with—many were sick and many died. (1 Cor. i. 7; xi. 30-32; xii. 9, 28.) The principle is indeed the same as that which, mentioned under the head of ‘Hindrances to Prayer’ (Chap. viii.), may in some cases, restrain prayer for the recovery of the sick. An unspiritual person influenced by blind sympathy might pray for his raising up, while one more in the secret of communion with God, would discern that such a request was not the mind of the Spirit. How morally different and elevated is all this, above such

charlatanries as the mis-named 'Christian Science' and 'Faith Healing!'

So, the large power of prayer in our text. 'Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,' is guarded by the moral conditions, 'If YE ABIDE IN ME, AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU,' conditions which involve not only godliness, but spirituality. If the words of Christ abide in one, they mould the heart and mind; they suggest the motives, govern the conscience, and in this happy condition of the soul, its requests naturally flow in the line of His revealed mind. Its instincts are correct, its desires according to His will, according to His 'WORDS.'

### III

'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.' (1 John iii. 20-22.)

HERE THERE ARE conditions of great importance—a practical conduct pleasing to God, and an uncondemning heart—a good conscience. These are imperative for intercourse with a holy God. False, imaginary deities may accept a compromise, such as penance or gifts. God must have the judgment of evil, in all those who draw near to Him. It is the same with prayer as with worship; there can be neither where there is defilement. 'Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever,' is an abiding principle. (Ps. xciii. 5.) And again, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.' (Ps. lxi. 18.)

But how blessed that God has provided for all the exigencies of His people in a defiling scene; and

hence it is ordained that, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' When there is so simple a way of discharge, why should any walk with a burdened conscience? An upright and honest confession, and we are not only forgiven but cleansed. As Elihu says of the soul that has been brought to the moral judgment of itself,

'He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him : and he shall see his face with joy. His flesh shall be fresher than a child : and he shall return to the days of his youth.' (Job xxxiii. 25, 26.)

The importance of this good conscience in connection with prayer is shewn by the fact that Scripture links it even with asking the prayers of others—

'Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.' (Heb. xiii. 18.)

'The prayer of the upright' is indeed the Lord's delight (Prov. xv. 8); and it is the prayer of 'the righteous' (in James v. 16) that is said to have much power.

Our text, however, though equivalent to a promise, is not exactly so in form. It is rather a positive statement that, given certain conditions, we do receive whatsoever we ask, and the conditions shew very plainly that success in prayer depends upon a godly life, an uncondemning heart as an inward state, and obedience ('keep his commandments') as an outward manifestation and test of the state.

But in the verses which precede, there are some interesting points to notice—

'My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.' (1 John iii. 18, 19.)

FIRST, knowing 'that we are of the truth,' in ver. 19,

does not mean knowing that we are Christians—which has been taken to be the sense; for the persons addressed were written to because they *were* Christians; because they knew the Father; because their sins were forgiven them for His name's sake. (1 John ii. 12, 13.) But, being exhorted to love not 'in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth,' the apostle adds, 'Hereby we know that we are of *the truth*.' That is, that we are actually walking in the truth; that we are possessed by, we are '*of the truth*.' Love in deed and love in truth, give us this consciousness and assurance of heart before God. We cannot enjoy it otherwise. If there are matters between us and God, it is useless to ignore them. God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. But if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God, and receive whatsoever things we ask, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. It is not a question of being, or not being, children of God; it is a question of the children being on terms of happy confidence with their Father. If I owe a man a debt which I ought to have paid, there must be constraint on meeting him, but if there is nothing between us, and I believe in his generosity, I can confidently go to him with a request. Beautiful, happy condition for the soul to be in with God!

This passage is a weighty one for the conscience of the believer, but its practical use has been much lost sight of through the misapplication just mentioned. The test is not as to whether we be children of God. It is one for saints to apply to their actual condition of soul. Are we thus before our God—that with an uncondemning heart, we are in communion with

Him, and, as a fact, habitually receiving His answers to our prayers.

SECONDLY, the apostle says, 'Let us love not in word, neither in tongue.' This looks like tautology, but is not so. The term 'logos,' here translated 'word,' is of much wider signification than our 'word.' In English 'not in word, neither in tongue,' certainly is repetition. But this word 'logos' means, in Greek, not merely the word by which thought is expressed, but the *thought itself*. So that the force of what the apostle says is, that we are not to love in theory (or thought), neither in mere language ('in tongue'), but in deed and in truth.

For there is a pietistic state, by no means rare, in which emotions and thoughts are enjoyed, the truth intellectually delighted in, but without fruition. Love as a theory is held to be very beautiful—but is not practised. The heart deceives itself. This is loving in thought merely. The text in question is the converse of 1 Cor. xiii. There Paul treats of works without love; here it is, as it were, love without works, that is, mere sentimentality. But our passage crushes both of these errors; not only condemns love without deeds, but also deeds without love. It requires deeds, but the deeds must be from love; that is, not in theory, nor in talk, but in acts *and in truth*. Our God is love, and that alone will satisfy Him in His children—love 'in deed and in truth.' How penetrating is the word of God, exposing every mode in which the heart would either deceive itself or deceive others! It is sharper than a two-edged sword, laying bare the thoughts and intents of the heart. Many, in reading these verses, have supposed

that the language was mere repetition ; that it is not so only shows the wisdom which underlies every word of inspiration.

## IV

‘And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us : and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him.’ (1 John v. 14, 15.)

WE have already seen that the formative power in the heart, of the words of Christ dwelling there, and an upright uncondemning heart with confidence in God, are the conditions of successful prayer. In the present verses, all that is assumed. It is supposed that we are asking according to His will, and what we have here is that, so asking, God always hears us. ‘He is not like man, often occupied so that he cannot listen, or careless so that he will not.’\* It is a precious and wonderful thing for the creature, man, notwithstanding the fall, to be so restored to moral harmony with God as to be able, under the guidance of the Spirit, to ask according to His omniscient will. We do not read that angels have this privilege. They indeed ‘do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word’ (Ps. ciii. 20), but the intimacy with God which prayer affords is, apparently, conferred upon man only. Surely this bestowment is a proof of God’s desire that man should enjoy communion with Himself. Do we prize this privilege as we should ?

But our spirits are not always up to this level, and Rom. viii. 26-28, recognizes this case. We know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit

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\* Darby. *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible.* Vol. V. on 1 John v.

helpeth our infirmities. And He who searches our hearts knows how to take up all that is of His own Spirit in those hearts. As to the result, 'we know' that all things work together for good to them that love God. And this gives peace, whether our requests are granted or not. So we are not to restrain prayer because we are not on the highest plane of communion. On the contrary, it is our privilege—in everything—to let our requests be made known unto God. (Phil. iv. 6.) An instructive example of this is Paul's prayer about the thorn in the flesh. (2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.) For this thing he besought the Lord that it might depart from him. But his prayer was not in the intelligence of God's mind, who had a better thing in store, which Paul would have lost had his request been granted. The believer may indeed, as a chastisement, receive that which in unbrokenness he clamours for, but the result will not be happiness—as we read, 'He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.' (Ps. cvi. 15.) To present our requests, with submission, is, however, always our privilege. The example of Paul shows this. He besought the Lord for his desire not once only, but thrice. In result, such submission was wrought in his soul that ultimately he took pleasure in the very infirmities of which he had implored the removal. A discontented and unsubject heart may reproach God with not answering its prayers; but in the retrospect of eternity, how much cause for praise may be discovered in the requests which our gracious God now refuses to grant!

So far from restraining prayer, we really need more frankness with God. Scripture amply warrants this, and it is illustrated by the case of good Ananias

(Acts ix. 10-17.) The Lord sends him to Saul of Tarsus to receive him after his conversion. But Ananias has a difficulty in his mind, and with beautiful simplicity and reverence, he lays it before the Lord.

'Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. . . . And Ananias went his way.'

The Lord it will be observed, does not in the least reprove Ananias; and the incident left on record thus, surely, gives encouragement to us to tell the Lord with reverential intimacy about all our difficulties. Indeed this episode, and that of Paul in 2 Cor. xii., previously referred to, are strikingly similar as precedents for freeness, yet reverence, of communion; and withal of perfect submission. The two instances are remarkably alike in tone and spirit.

But there is a higher example than Paul or Ananias—even Jesus in Gethsemane. Not indeed, as so often in our own case, of prayer below the highest level—for even in that dark hour His communion was perfect—but here, as Man, He lays the incomparable exercises of His heart before God, mentioning something which He *would* desire if only compatible with the divine will. Spreading out the agony of His soul in prayer, He exclaims:

'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' (Matt. xxvi. 39.)

Here is perfection, alike in His communion as a Man with the Father about the appalling prospect before Him, and also, notwithstanding the prospect, in the



absolute surrender of Himself to the Father's will, the Father's purpose. Yea, we need more frankness and confidence in our communion with God. 'Ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.' (Ps. lxii. 8.)

## V

IN PHILIPPIANS WE ARE AUTHORISED to bring all our requests to God.

'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts through Christ Jesus.' (iv. 6, 7.)

But here it is noticeable that the promise is not, as in 1 John iii. 22, that we receive whatsoever we ask. But, having laid our requests with submission before Him, His peace protecting our hearts and thoughts is the present effect. As to the requests, if He do not grant them, it is because He has for us something better. His child should not wish what is contrary to His will.

To be permitted to take all our cares to God is a large privilege. Hast thou known, reader, the relief of telling sorrow to another? And does God invite thy confidence—place Himself as thine intimate Friend? Yes; and peace, profound peace, follows upon the exercise of this precious privilege.

## VI

'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.' (Matt. xviii. 19, 20.)

THE PROMISE IN Matt. xviii. 19, is peculiar, it is to *united prayer*. The essence of this promise lies in

the assured presence of the Lord Himself with only two gathered in His name. The agreement in prayer of such a gathering is promised to be acceded to by the Father. But see Chapter IX following, on The Prayer-meeting. The promises in John xiv., xvi., are to prayers in Christ's name, and may be realised by the individual in his closet. The promise here, however, is to the concurrence in prayer of even only two 'gathered together in His name.'

## VII

PRAYER IN JAMES presents most interesting features.

FIRST. There is the encouragement to prayer which the Holy Spirit addresses to our hearts by reminding us that Elias who wrought so wondrously was a man of like passions to ourselves; as if to say, 'There is an example for you; see what is open to you!'

SECONDLY. James, by the Holy Spirit, makes a positive revelation of facts in Elijah's history, which otherwise we should not have known. The Historical Books give us the outward acts of Elijah; James reveals the process which brought them about. Elijah's first introduction to us is in 1 Kings xvii. 1, where the great drama of his exploits is opened with the simple statement that he 'said unto Ahab,' '*As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*' This is the first mention of Elijah. Nothing is said of him but that he was a Tishbite of Gilead. Who he was—how it happened that this person with no official authority—no *locus standi*—should thrust himself into the presence of the

king, and make such a dread announcement, the history does not say. But there is a great underlying principle. It is that when the official representation of God is false, God's Spirit will raise up a witness from outside. It is ever so. 'When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.' (Isa. lix. 19.) And there is nothing in which God's sovereignty is more displayed than in the instruments He chooses. When the civil rule is apostate, and eight hundred false prophets are loud in the land, He will act by whom He will. Now James reveals the secret of Elijah's surprising action. That secret was communion with God.

'Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.' (James v. 17, 18.)

Thus the Old Testament gives us the magnificent public action; James, the prayer on which it was based. This secret dealing of God with His servants is His constant way. David slays the lion and the bear, making experience of the power of God where no one sees him, ere he wields the weapon of faith before the armies of Israel. Moses, a learned man, has with 'all that weight of learning,' to pass forty years keeping a flock in the desert, before he is used to face Pharaoh and deliver Israel. And Elijah's proceedings, which read like the intrepid actings of a hero, are shown to be the product of earnest prayer; and when afterwards his communion falls in its level, he is discovered as a man of like passions with ourselves, for the prophet who could boldly confront the majesty of the king flees for his life at the threat of

the king's wife. This shews that it is only as sustained by God that we can act for Him. 'Without me, ye can do nothing.'

THIRDLY. The example of Elijah is given by James as both illustration and proof of a general principle, namely, that 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' (Chap. v. 16.) But this translation is admitted to be unsatisfactory. That a prayer which is 'effectual' avails much, is a truism. If it is *effectual* it avails completely, and it is anticlimax to say that it avails much when it is already admitted to avail perfectly. Mr Darby's translation gives :

'The fervent (or, operative) supplication of a righteous man has much power,'

which is closer to the original than either the Authorised or the Revised Version. Probably the essential points of the scripture are—(a) That the supplicant is a righteous man; (b) that his prayer is energetic; not a listless, apathetic, indolent performance, but the prayer of *one who means it*; as Paul speaks of himself as 'night and day, praying exceedingly,' etc. (1 Thess. iii. 10); or, as Jacob on another occasion, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.' (c) That prayer of this character has indeed *much power*. This is the moral which the apostle James enforces.

FOURTHLY. PRAYER IN CONNECTION WITH SICKNESS. A system has arisen and been much noised about, which takes the name of 'Faith-healing.' This, while ostensibly based upon James v., is little short of a pretence to miraculous powers. The published writings on the subject include gross false doctrine,

which will not here be examined, as this has been efficiently done elsewhere.\*

But a brief indication of the real bearings of the scripture in question may perhaps be profitable. The passage is as follows :—

'Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' (Vers. 14-16.)

Now in these verses we have at the outset a defining note which restrains the application of the passage beyond a certain limit; the application is expressly to the sick '*among you*,' that is, the assembly of God's people. This scripture therefore affords no warrant for a popular system of semi-miraculous cures administered to all and sundry. Sickness amongst God's people stands on special ground. It is sometimes on account of sin; † and this passage in James recognises that the sickness about which the elders were sent for might be such, for it says, 'If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.' Not that this would be always so; but *if* so, his sins should be forgiven him.

Again, so far from a public proclaimed system of healing, the course enjoined in the Epistle of James, was essentially private. The sick one was *to send for* the elders of the church, and they were to pray over him.

Further, it might, or might not, be that the patient

\* *Faith Healing, Are its Doctrines Scriptural?* By C. D. Maynard, London. G. Morrish, Paternoster Square.

† See Chapter VIII., following, on Hindrances to Prayer.

would himself have faith to be healed. The faith-healers imperatively require such faith; Scripture does not. The prayer spoken of in James is the prayer of the elders, and in reference to this it is said, 'The prayer of faith shall save the sick.' It may be easily supposed that the sick one would himself join in the prayer, and that, with more or less assurance of faith—but it was the '*prayer of faith*' that carried efficacy.

Finally, nothing could be more outside the scope of the passage in James than the popular notion of faith-healing. The case contemplated in James is clearly one of a very serious nature, where death is imminent; and so also in 1 John v. The idea of the scripture being used as a substitute for medicines which God has provided in nature is not only unwarranted, but is contrary to the scriptural and apostolic principle of using remedies for ailments, (see both 2 Kings xx. 7, and 1 Tim. v. 23.) It is theological quackery.

#### VIII

PRAYER IN THE NAME OF CHRIST is so large a subject that it is dealt with in a separate chapter—that which follows.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRAYER IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

'And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. HITHERTO HAVE YE ASKED NOTHING IN MY NAME: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. . . AT THAT DAY YE SHALL ASK IN MY NAME; and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.' (John xvi. 23-27.)

It should be remembered that chapters xiv., xv., and xvi. of John's Gospel are all one discourse: hence the foundation is found in xiv. of allusions far on in xvi. In chapter xiv. 16th verse the Lord introduces the immense subject of the coming of the Holy Spirit—unknown then; and, it is to be feared, in its full bearings, but slightly grasped by many Christians now. He says:—

'I will pray the Father and he will give you another Comforter.'  
(John xiv. 16.)

and subsequently in the discourse, He mentions various characteristics of 'that day'—the day when the Spirit should have come. Our present business is with those which relate to prayer.

A new thing is announced. Prayer 'in that day' was to be in the name of the Lord Jesus. It had not been so before, and was not so then: as He states,

'Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name.' (Chap. xvi. 23, 24.) Thus the prayer of Matthew vi., commonly called 'the Lord's prayer,' is revoked, for the Lord declares that in the future, prayer was to be in His name, and that so far it had not been.

Has the reader ever noticed how a letter-knowledge of Scripture may sometimes hinder its spiritual apprehension? Perhaps it is thus with the expression, 'In my name'—so familiar as a phrase, yet its power so slightly understood. The fact is that prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus is one of the special distinctions of the present day of grace. The Lord indicates this by the statement, '*Hitherto* have ye asked nothing in my name,' and thus marks off our position in prayer from that of God's people in the past. Whether it be Abraham in Gen. xviii., or Solomon at the dedication of the temple, Daniel in Babylon, or Hezekiah, (2 Kings xix. 15)—each addressed God suitably according to the character, or the relationship, in which He was known. But the revelation of the divine nature was then only partial. Jesus, however, revealed the Father—yet, until the coming of the Holy Ghost, the disciples' comprehension of that revelation, as of much that he taught, was obscure. In the 16th of John, however, the Lord is about to go away. He had already taught them to pray to God as their Father, but naming Him only by description, as 'Our Father who art in heaven,' for He had not as yet shown them plainly of the Father. (John xvi. 25.) Now, he announces a new thing, based on His ascension. They would approach *the Father* in His name; that is, not now One distantly described as 'in heaven' but One fully known as **THE FATHER**: even as John states, 'I write unto you, little children,



because ye have known the Father.' (1 John ii. 13.)

Praying in His name involves these points :—

- (1) Our title of access to the Father Himself.
- (2) That so approaching the Father we come in all the potency, all the value, of the name of the Lord Jesus.
- (3) That the Holy Spirit has come, and gives us, not only consciousness of our position as sons with the Father (Gal. iv. 6) but spiritual capacity to use this new privilege—we have access through Christ, by the Spirit, to the Father. (Eph. ii. 18.)

This, it will be seen, is a deeper thing than the verbal tacking on the Lord's name as a form at the end of a prayer. Delightful, gracious way, in which the Lord puts it! 'I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loveth you.' He, as it were, introduces us to the Father; and that in the tactful manner of one who would place us at ease in the atmosphere of the Father's love. Would that we realised more the immense power of our position with the Father, and the value of the name of Jesus in which to draw near! All this, it will be observed, depends upon the vast change implied in the words 'because I go unto the Father.' (John xiv. 12.) Man in His Person would be entering into a position in which man had never been before; and He labours to convey to their minds what would be its significance for them.

So far, as to the privilege and power of His name given to us for our prayers. This is the positive side; but there is also a negative. There is what His name excludes, as well as what it includes. 'Whatsoever,' is the promise, but that is defined and limited by 'in my name.' As another has said:

" 'Whatsoever!' Were it alone, it would be boundless, and the Lord would thus have opened the door to all the desires of

unbroken will among His people. But He adds, 'in my name.' This is His limit—the barrier He sets up.\*

Not only, however, do we fail to understand, and fail to use, our privilege of prayer in Christ's name, but some in trying to explain the matter have not only mystified it, but have fallen into error, as witness the following:—

'Coming now to what is found in John xvi. as to prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in the name of the Son (as in chap. xiv.), it should be first observed that our access to our God and Father is always and only through Christ. As Paul writes, 'For through Him, we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit unto the Father.' We cannot come in any other way. But coming thus, 'through Him' before God, the question is at once met, What is praying in His name? It could not be using His name as a plea, or entreating to be heard for His sake, because the Lord says, without any limitation whatever, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.'

'By praying in His name, then, we understand appearing before the Father on His behalf, and as warranted to be there by Him, so that we are there with all the Son's claim upon the Father's heart, and taken up in the power of the Holy Ghost to utter and pray for, in communion with His own heart, all that He Himself desires to be accomplished for the Father's glory and His own joy. Praying, then, in His name, is to intercede for His own interests, His own desires, objects and ends.

'If this be so, this character of prayer has no reference to our own personal needs or circumstances; indeed, it could not. And let it not be forgotten that there is a circle in which we have no needs, because we are lost, absorbed in the Father's counsels for the glory of His beloved Son. At the same time we have full liberty to come at all times, through our blessed Lord, into the presence of God, and to tell out everything that burdens our hearts (Phil. iv. 6, 7); only this is not praying "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."†

There is here either truth, or error, and on such a matter there ought to be no doubt. According to this writer, the Christian has the name of Christ for some only of his prayers; for the rest, that Blessed

\* From a Tract entitled *In My Name*, by P. J. L. Loizeaux Brothers, New York.

† *The Christian Friend and Instructor*, vol. xxiii. p. 82.

Name is not available. This is of practical importance, for if accepted, it must hamper the believer in the holy exercise of prayer, and greatly restrict the power as well as the liberty and joy of his communion with God. If there be such a distinction, Scripture might be expected to express it with unmistakable plainness; but Scripture may be searched for it in vain. Of course one cannot prove the negative: the duty of proof rests with those who assert a new doctrine. No positive scripture, however, is cited, as it surely would have been, if there had been one to cite.

That prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is a characteristic feature of Christianity has already been shown. The Lord intimates this, when, referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, He says:

‘And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in *my name*, he will give it you. *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*’ (John xvi. 23, 24.)

He had previously instructed His disciples:

‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye - then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?’ (Matt. vii. 7-11.)

But this, it will be observed, is based upon the benevolent character of God, not shewing *how* divine beneficence could be extended to evil men, without a compromise of divine righteousness. That is not shewn, because the work had not yet been accomplished, on the basis of which only could God forbear

with men, much less bless them, forgive their sins, or answer their prayers. God's grace to man was as yet administered on the ground of the foreseen sacrifice of Christ. (Rom. iii. 25.) But we are in the period which Christ referred to as 'that day.' (John xiv. 12; xvi. 23). It was then future; but now the great work of atonement has been done, and the position is made clear. Christ is the propitiation for sins that are past through the forbearance of God, as well as the basis for all blessing by God toward sinners at any time. This now is no longer mysterious, but open and manifest. God's attributes are reconciled in the cross; His righteousness in bestowing blessing is declared; and a sequence of this is that PRAYER IS NOW IN THE NAME OF CHRIST. It could not be so before, for the Lord was in humiliation: He had emptied Himself, and had not where to lay His head. Observe then that the name given us in which to present our prayers is that of Jesus glorified at the Father's right hand; not the name as despised on earth, but as acclaimed in heaven. And what a name of power it is! Every knee in heaven and on earth shall bow at the name of Jesus—infernal beings also. (Phil. ii. 10.) And in that name—so glorious, so beloved—we are privileged to approach the Father.

Now in ver. 12 of John xiv. the Lord speaks of a certain result of His going to the Father. 'Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto my Father.' The next verse is joined to this by the conjunction 'and.' 'And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do.' It will be seen, then, that prayer in His name is a consequence of the position which He was about to take at the Father's right hand. It is a broad dispensational privilege. So far from

being confined to some only of our prayers, His name, according to the shewing of Scripture, avails for all. At least, we find that when the Lord announced the new privilege, He did not attach to it any such restriction as that laid down by the article in *The Christian Friend*; and not only is there a conspicuous absence of the limitation, but the Lord's words in the announcement are really inconsistent with it. Thus he says:

'Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' (John xvi. 24.)

This goes well with the unrestricted privilege conferred; but how ill it would assort with a statement that it related to some only of the believer's prayers, that it did not extend to his personal needs or circumstances; that these were outside Christ's interests; that believers might go to God about them, but *not* in Christ's name! How would all this match with the direction, 'Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full'? So chilling a declaration would quench fulness of joy; and regret, rather than that, would be the consequence of such a narrow interpretation. So far no positive scripture for the doctrine has been shown, and the style and manner of our Lord, in speaking on the subject, are repugnant to the very notion.

The article says:—

'By praying in His name, then, we understand appearing before the Father on His behalf, and as warranted to be there by Him, so that we are there with all the Son's claim upon the Father's heart, and taken up in the power of the Holy Ghost to utter and pray for, in communion with His own heart, all that He Himself desires to be accomplished for the Father's glory and His own joy. Praying then in His name is to intercede for His own interests, His own desires, objects and

ends. If this be so, this character of prayer has no reference to our own personal needs or circumstances, indeed, it could not.

But this is mere assertion—simply what the writer ‘understands,’ as he says. That, however, is not Christian teaching. ‘If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.’ (1 Pet. iv. 11.) We have no inspired teachers now, so that teaching, to be profitable, must be shewn to be based upon that which is inspired—Scripture. What a man merely ‘understands’ cannot edify, because he may be right or he may be wrong; and by accepting what he says, I may be allowing my mind to assimilate as truth that which is really error. Teaching must be certain if it is to build up the soul—it must have the certainty of Scripture for its basis.

However, it is postulated that prayer in Christ’s name is only about a certain class of subjects which are defined as ‘Christ’s own interests, His own desires, objects and ends.’ But where is the authority for saying that Christ’s ‘interests, desires, objects and ends’ cannot include the ‘personal needs or circumstances’ of His saints? This, again, is pure assumption, a demarcation of the subjects of prayer which is quite arbitrary and artificial. Is it not also a misrepresentation of the heart of Christ towards His people, to say that their interests are not within the circle of His interests? Scripture tells us that He is ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities.’ (Heb. iv.) Even of Israel it is said, ‘In all their affliction he was afflicted.’ ‘He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.’ (Isa. lxiii. 9; Zech. ii. 8.) When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the saints, did He not say, ‘Why persecutest thou ME?’

The shepherd in the parable laid the sheep upon his shoulders, and bore it right home, a figure of Christ's care over the individual believer all along the way. (Luke xv.)

'The Shepherd's bosom bears each lamb  
O'er rock and waste and wild ;  
The object of that love I am,  
And carried like a child.'

How then is it possible that the personal needs or circumstances of saints can be foreign to the interests of Christ? To say so upsets our dearest conception of His character as well as of His relationships to, and sympathies with, the saints.

According to Scripture, what governs the granting of requests under the promise we are discussing is not the subjects of the prayers, but their being in Christ's name—that is, truly in Christ's name. Thus a prayer about gospel-work (which certainly is Christ's 'own interest') *may* be out of harmony with the mind of the Spirit, astray from the Spirit's guidance as to place, time, or other matters, and therefore not truly in Christ's name; while on the other hand, a prayer about family, or business, or other 'personal needs or circumstances,' *may* be fully under the guidance of the Spirit, and truly presented in Christ's name to the Father. The real question then is not the subject of the prayer, but having the mind of the Spirit about it: that is, whether what I ask about is that which I can ask in CHRIST'S NAME. The subject may be the smallest or the greatest, but if one is led by the Spirit to make the request in Christ's name, the prayer so presented will be honoured. It may relate to any subject—illness, poverty, personal failure, business affairs, difficulties

with unreasonable men, yea, everything that affects the pathway of the saint below, just as much as the state of assemblies, the gospel, or missions abroad—for the word is 'IN EVERYTHING by prayer and supplication' 'let your requests be made known unto God.' (Phil. iv.) What a deprivation would it be not to have the name of the Lord Jesus in which to go to God about *all* these things!

But, says the article, 'this is not praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.' In whose name then is it? Has not His sacrificial work laid the basis for answering every prayer that is according to God's will? About our needs and circumstances, therefore, we go to God in the name of Christ, because He has Himself, in His work, provided for the granting of our requests; and our author's definition, 'all that He desires to be accomplished for the Father's glory and His own joy' includes every proper subject of His people's prayers, even if about personal needs and circumstances.

Looking fairly at the whole subject, the difficult point obviously is the absoluteness of the promise to prayer in Christ's name, all such prayer being granted. And the question naturally arises, What about the numerous requests presented in that name which are never granted? The reply is that those requests, though ostensibly in Christ's name, cannot have been truly so—Christ's name having been tacked on as a formula to prayers not inwrought by the Spirit in the heart and therefore not really in Christ's name; for the mere repetition of the form of the words is not really praying in the name of the Lord Jesus. There seems to be no other conclusion that can be drawn. If God's word tells us



that prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus is granted, and prayers which we have made are not granted, then they cannot have been truly in His name. The *Christian Friend and Instructor* has endeavoured to solve the difficulty by a theory that prayer in Christ's name can only be about a certain class of subjects, and these it proceeds to define; but the definition is so erroneous that it makes the 'personal needs and circumstances' of Christ's people to be outside the circle of Christ's own interests, and part of the Christian's prayers to be under the conditions of the present dispensation, and part under those of the old!

But prayer in Christ's name is not the only case in regard to which the promise is unlimited. The following promises are as absolute and unlimited as that in question, viz:—

- 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.' Matt. xviii. 19
- 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' Matt. xxi. 22
- 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' John xv. 7
- 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God, and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.' 1 John iii. 21, 22
- 'If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions, that we desired of him.' 1 John v. 14, 15

Now if the absoluteness of the promise requires that the subjects be curtailed in one case it does so

in all. But not in one of these cases is any such limit imposed by the Lord or His apostles. The word is, 'anything that they shall ask'; 'whatsoever ye shall ask'; 'ye shall ask what ye will'; and so on. If the suggested limitation of subjects were intended, here certainly would be the place to expect it; but Scripture is silent on the point; and not only so, but the language which the Spirit of God employs is specifically broad and comprehensive. It is impossible to suppose that all these promises, as well as those to Christ's name, would have been left unguarded by the restrictions in question, if those restrictions were intended to exist. The limiting of the promise, therefore, in all or in any one of these cases, to a certain class of subjects, must be rejected as a mistaken explanation, and—however well intended—a human invention, and a misleading gloss upon Scripture.

It is true, however, that there is a class of prayer which is above the level of personal needs and circumstances. Examples of this are the magnificent prayer of the church in Acts iv. 24-30; the two prayers of the apostle Paul in Ephesians (first, in chap. i. 16-23, and secondly, in chap. iii. 14-21). But that we have not Christ's name for prayer about personal needs and circumstances, as well as for the more exalted descriptions of prayer just referred to, is pure imagination, and not to be found in Scripture. ALL TRUE PRAYER NOW IS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. (John xvi. 23, 24.) Doubtless there is a great deal of prayer colourably in the name of Christ, which is not genuinely so, and this is not transmuted into true prayer by adding at the end, as a formula of words, 'in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ.' Scripture admits that 'we know not what we should pray for as we ought,' but 'he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to God.' (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) The great requisite for prayer, therefore, is to have the mind of the Spirit about the matter in hand, and this can only be acquired by being morally near to the Lord, abiding in Him experimentally. 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' (John xv. 7.) Hence the humility, the self-distrust, submissiveness to the divine will, in which spirit only can true prayer be made; but whatever the Father recognises as in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will undoubtedly be granted. THERE IS, HOWEVER, NO OTHER NAME IN WHICH TO PRAY.

'In my name' has an exclusive force with reference to prayer, as has been previously stated (page 32). But this limitation is of a totally different nature from that which we have been discussing. This limits prayer in Christ's name to all true prayer—all prayer which is according to God, whatever the subject. The other confines prayer in Christ's name to a certain class of subjects.

One or two points remain to be noticed. The article says:—

'By praying in His name, then, we understand appearing before the Father on His behalf . . . to pray for . . . all that He Himself desires to be accomplished . . . Praying then in His name is to intercede for His own interests, His own desires, objects and ends.'

This is a complete inversion of the truth. We do not appear before the Father on Christ's behalf,

but with His name on our behalf. Christ does not need anyone to intercede for Him! We need His intercession, and blessed be His name, we have it, for He ever liveth to make intercession for us. (Rom. viii.; Heb. vii.) What an upsettal of divine order and fitness this teaching leads to, for it makes the saints intercessors for Christ, whereas Christ is Intercessor for them!

Again the article says :

'Coming now to what is found in John xvi. as to prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in the name of the Son (as in chap. xiv.), it should be observed,' etc., etc.

Now suppose a Christian reading this when he has not his Bible at hand. What will he think? He will perhaps say to himself, 'Prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in the name of the Son. What does it mean? I did not know that there was such a distinction!' Well, when he looks at his Bible he will find that the distinction is of the same class as that which we have already considered, namely, without Scripture basis—purely imaginary. Here are the two scriptures in question, and it will probably puzzle any one to discover the distinction referred to.

Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing *in my name*; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. John xvi. 23, 24.

Whatsoever ye shall ask *in my name*, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything *in my name* I will do it. John xiv. 13, 14.

Thus it will be seen, prayer in John xvi. is stated as 'in my name'; and prayer in John xiv. is likewise 'in my name.' In chap. xiv. the purpose is disclosed—'that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' But

prayer in John xiv. is no more in the name of the Son than in John xvi. And prayer in John xvi. is just as much in the name of the Son as in John xiv. It only remains to be added that the words 'in my name,' in the original Greek, are exactly the same in each case. So much for the scriptural accuracy of this teaching.

Now is all this a mere dispute about words? Had it been so these lines would not have been written. But an error in the things of God is never innocuous. A man may believe what he likes about a point in physical science, and it will have no bad effect. But moral or spiritual error cannot be imbibed without harm. In this case there is an attempt, probably all unconscious, to rob the children of God of a precious encouragement to prayer, and of spiritual power in making prayer.

Apart, however, from positive error, teaching of this sort is injurious, from the state of doubt and perplexity which it creates. How few who read the article in the *Christian Friend* will understand what is really meant? But how many will come away from its perusal, with a confused idea that there is something very abstruse about prayer, which they have never heard of before, and which they do not understand now? They have always believed that the Lord's name was given to them for their prayers. But they are told that that is not so. It only applies to half their prayers, perhaps only to a quarter, perhaps to still less. They must be 'in a circle in which' they 'have no needs,' and are 'lost, absorbed in the Father's counsels,' before they can pray in the name of the Lord Jesus! At any rate, the question is so perplexing as to which of their prayers that

blessed name avails for, and which not, that practically the power and effect of the promise are lost. The distinctions which the Holy Spirit makes in Scripture are deeply important, even the smallest. The distinctions of the human mind, foisted into the things of God, are confusing and detrimental.

‘HITHERTO HAVE YE ASKED NOTHING IN MY NAME. ASK AND YE SHALL RECEIVE, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL.’  
(John xvi. 24.)

## CHAPTER V

### SHOULD PRAYER BE ADDRESSED TO CHRIST

SOME may be surprised at any doubt on this point; for the instincts of the soul that has been born anew, lead it out frequently in prayer to the Lord Jesus, as well as to the Father. Still the question *has* been raised, and it may be useful therefore to refer to scriptures which bear upon the subject.

That which has given rise to doubt is the following verse, viz., 'And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.' (John xvi. 23.) Taken as it stands, this would seem conclusive that prayer should not be addressed to the Lord. But the translation is misleading; for two words of differing force in the original are here rendered by the one word '*ask*.' The word rendered '*ask*' in the first sentence of the verse is *ἐρωτάω* (erotao); that in the latter sentence is *αἰτέω* (aiteo). Thus, 'And in that day ye shall ask (erotao) me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask (aiteo) the Father in my name, he will give it you.'

The former word (erotao) originally only meant *to enquire*, and in classic Greek is used in that sense only; but in Hellenistic, or New Testament Greek, it

has the same double meaning as our English word 'ask,' namely, both to enquire and to make request, as in the instances: He asked the way to Richmond; he asked water.

The second word 'aiteo,' means *only* to ask for something. But 'erotao' having two meanings, the question arises, In which of those meanings is it to be taken in the verse we are considering? And this seems to be indicated by the context, for the Lord has just been answering the enquiries of the disciples; as it says in the nineteenth verse, 'Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to *ask* him.' Here the word translated 'ask' is 'erotao.' Then He answers their questions, and in verse 23 adds, 'In that day ye will not question (erotao) me.' And now, passing on to treat of prayer, He leaves the word of double meaning, and employs one which only means to make request (aiteo), 'Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask (aiteo) the Father in my name, he will give it you.' So that when the Lord said, 'In that day ye shall ask me nothing,' He was not forbidding prayer to Himself, but informing them that in a day soon to come they would no longer be interrogating Him. He, indeed, would not be here to be enquired of; He would be at the Father's right hand, and the Holy Spirit would be here to guide them into all truth. This verse, therefore, may safely be said to give no countenance to the view that prayer may not be made to the Lord Jesus.

Not only, however, does this scripture furnish no objection against prayer to the Lord, but we have elsewhere in Scripture the highest positive authority for it, namely, Stephen, and the apostle Paul.

'And they stoned Stephen calling upon, and saying, Lord Jesus,



receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'  
(Acts vii. 59, 60).

And the apostle Paul tells us,

'There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.'  
(2 Cor. xii. 7, 8).

Besides this there are prayers to which Paul gives utterance in the course of his Epistles; and these are addressed both to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus,

'Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way unto you: and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men.'  
(1 Thess. iii. 11, 12, R.V.)

Again,

'Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work.'  
(2 Thess. ii. 16, 17, R.V.).

Once again,

'And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ.'  
(2 Thess. iii. 5, R.V.).

To conclude. John xvi. 23 does not forbid prayer to Christ; and there is ample authority for it in the examples which Scripture records for our own instruction.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN RELATION TO PRAYER

ALTHOUGH Christ is the One to whose Name saints are gathered at the prayer-meeting, it is equally necessary to recognise the function or office of the Holy Spirit in prayer; and that, whether in private or public. Consider the magnitude of the fact that the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost, and, abiding with us for ever, is here to-day. (John xiv. 16.) He dwells in the church which is builded together for His habitation; He dwells in the individual believer. (1 Cor. vi. 19; Eph. ii. 22.) Such a fact cannot but have immense bearings. Now we find that this indwelling Spirit is our Instructor and Guide in prayer.

'Praying in the Holy Ghost.' (Jude 20.)

'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,' (Eph. vi. 18.)

'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to God.' (Rom. viii. 26, 27.)

When Christ was with His disciples *He* taught them to pray; John had similarly taught *his* disciples. But now all that is changed. It was expedient for the disciples that Christ should go away in order that the Holy Ghost should come; and He, being here,

takes the office of forming our minds and hearts in prayer. Truly, we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but—as dwelling in us—the Spirit Himself maketh intercession. The words ‘for us’ in Rom. viii. 26, are not in the best texts, and, like many well-meant additions to Scripture, only mar its perfectness. Maketh intercession *for us* inserted in this verse, would rather give the idea of the blessed Spirit and the saints as two distinct parties, and that He, externally to us, makes intercession for us. That this is not the sense, is clear from the next words—

‘He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to God.’ (Ver. 27.)

Thus then, God who looks down into the heart, sees there the inwrought desires and prayers of the Spirit; and the intercession which the Spirit there makes, for and on behalf of the saints, is according to God. The structure of this scripture (Rom. viii. 26, 27) is remarkable. As regards ourselves, the Spirit is so identified with us, that God, in searching the hearts, finds there the mind of the Spirit; and *this* is what He graciously takes up, not the workings of the flesh. But as regards God—whatever may be the Spirit’s condescension to us—the Spirit stands in all His own power and dignity as a Person of the Godhead, to plead for the saints. What solemnity, what divine value, clothes the prayers of saints, when the form in which they come before God is that of intercession by the Spirit Himself! On our side this may reach down to an inarticulate groan; Godward it rises to the height of the Spirit’s own intercession. (ver. 26.)

The bearing of this upon prayer is most encouraging. Here we find the Holy Spirit as dwelling

in us, graciously identifying Himself in tender sympathy with our weakness, with our infirmities. The church which Christ has purchased with His own blood is so precious that the blessed Spirit must come and dwell there and look after it. Being here He is our Paraclete ; that is, Manager of our affairs, or Divine Helper. He opposes the flesh in us, (Gal. v. 17) helps our infirmities, condescends to our ignorance, and enters into our sorrows with groanings which cannot be uttered. We do not think enough of the sympathy of the Spirit of God with us. He is that ' other Paraclete ' who, the Lord said, was to replace Himself on earth. Jesus took our infirmities, and the Spirit helpeth our infirmities ; Jesus groaned at Lazarus' grave, and the Spirit intercedes for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered. How great must be the interest of the Holy Spirit in us when He can come and dwell in us, not discontinuing His stay, albeit, alas, our ways so often grieve Him. (Eph. iv. 30.)

When once grasped, this truth of the function which the Holy Ghost graciously assumes in the matter of prayer, easily disposes of some popular errors.

### 1. PRAYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

If the Holy Spirit is in us, and is Himself the moving power and inditer of our prayers, then obviously to address our prayers *to Him* is an incongruity ; it is '*by Him*' that we 'have access to the Father.' (Eph. ii. 18.) For addressing the Holy Spirit, Scripture gives us neither precept nor example. Such hymns, therefore as that commencing 'Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,' however pious their in-

tention, are not framed in an intelligent apprehension of Christian doctrine. When we address God indefinitely, of course the three Persons of the Trinity are included, but when we pray to the Persons distinctively, it can only be to the Father, or to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## 2. FORMS OF PRAYER

By parity of reasoning, forms of prayer are quite inconsistent with the office of the Holy Ghost in the church. If He is Himself with us as inditer of our prayers, it is unworthy to limit Him to certain forms of words. People do it unwittingly; but every time a prayer-book is used, the Holy Ghost is dishonoured in His office as Paraclete. One grieves to think of the many pious souls, who are thus constantly sinning in ignorance. Suppose the greatest musical genius of the world came to reside with me that I might enjoy his compositions, and I, instead of listening to him, brought out a mean musical box, which could only regale me with its narrow stock of tunes, should I not be insulting my gracious guest? Admitted that we know not what we should pray for as we ought, the remedy is not that wise men should frame forms for us. Our resource is the Holy Spirit who helps our infirmities, condescends to our weaknesses, and intercedes with groans which cannot be uttered. When that mighty Spirit condescends to undertake this gracious function, what dishonour to Him, what a want of faith, to substitute a dead form for His living guidance!

## 3. USING THE LORD'S PRAYER

But some think, 'However I may distrust my own prayers, and even the Prayer Book, which, though

framed by good men, is not inspired; yet in "the Lord's Prayer" which He Himself ordained—surely we are on safe ground in using that?' This spirit of reverence for the Lord Jesus is certainly right, but the view expressed is oblivious of the immense change of affairs, consequent on the coming of the Holy Ghost, who, having descended on Christ at His baptism, descended upon the church at Pentecost, and is still here. In giving the prayer of Matt. vi., the Lord was performing the office of Paraclete which is now performed by the Holy Spirit. That prayer was absolutely perfect for the time and circumstances for which it was prescribed. It is not equally applicable to another time and altered circumstances. One or two points will be sufficient to establish this.

(1) The Lord Himself declared that in connection with the coming of the Holy Ghost there would be a change in respect of this very matter of prayer. In John xvi., He is speaking of a future day, 'When the Spirit of truth is come' (ver. 13), and in verses 23-26, deals with the subject of prayer in 'that day.' He says:

'Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. . . . At that day ye shall ask in my name.'  
(John xvi. 24, 26.)

Now here we see that the Lord Himself was leading the disciples beyond the so-called 'Lord's prayer'—for He tells them that, IN THE COMING ERA PRAYER WAS TO BE IN HIS NAME, which the prayer of Matthew vi. is not.

(2) Another indication of the incongruity of 'the Lord's Prayer' for the present time is that its aspiration is for the coming of the kingdom, 'Thy kingdom come.' This indeed was the Father's kingdom and

distinct from the Messianic, but the church has an earlier and a brighter hope than either, even to see and be with the Lord Himself *before* the kingdom comes. (1 Thess. iv. 16-18.)\*

There is no trace in Apostolic practice or precept of the use of the prayer of Matthew vi. This could scarcely be, if the prayer had been used, or intended to be used, when the church was under Apostolic guidance. The Lord indeed taught the disciples to pray, and did so perfectly. But the office of Paraclete on earth He has now relinquished to the Holy Spirit, to whose guidance therefore we are committed. Let us seek to be praying in the 'Holy Ghost'—knowing that the Spirit enters, with fullest, minutest sympathy, into all our infirmities, all our circumstances; and will give us desires, sentiments, and expressions appropriate to every experience, happy or sad, through which the soul can pass. The prayer of Matthew vi. belongs to a past period, before the Spirit had been given. We have the Holy Ghost Himself now, to indite our prayers.

The way in which the prayer of Matthew vi. is repeated by some Christians upon all occasions, and sometimes several times over—in the Church of England when the Litany and Communion service are used, five times in one morning—savours really of superstition, as if there were some charm in the recital of the words but it is 'vain repetition' against which the Lord expressly cautioned the disciples. (Matt. vi. 7.) The Church of Rome indeed enjoins numerous repetitions of the prayer, and it would

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\* The question of the true place of 'the Lord's Prayer' is fully discussed in a tract entitled *On the so-called Lord's Prayer*, by W. Kelly. (T. Weston, 53 Paternoster Row, London, E.C. Price 3d.)

seem that in other spheres a measure of superstition still lingers around that ancient and beautiful but superseded form. Traditionary sentiments and thoughts are difficult to surmount, but they are certain to lead astray. The only safe guide is Scripture; and while Scripture shows that the prayer of Matt. vi. was enjoined upon the Jewish disciples before the coming of the Holy Ghost, it also shows that in another day when the Holy Ghost would be here as Paraclete, prayer would 'in that day' be under different conditions. Those who still adhere to the prayer of Matt. vi. are, in this respect, going back from the status of Christian privilege to the time before redemption was accomplished, before the ascension of Christ, and before the coming of the Holy Spirit.



## CHAPTER VII

### SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION AND CONFLICT

THE record about Daniel sheds light upon the hindrances, not so much to prayer, as to the answering of prayer. How many devout supplicants are perplexed at not receiving what they pray for! Well, we find that though the answer to Daniel's prayer was delayed, the delay was not because he was not heard—

'Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me.'  
(Dan. x. 12, 13.)

Thus, then, there were spiritual impediments, not to Daniel's prayer, not to its being heard and granted, but to the answer reaching him. Here there is good encouragement. For we are apt to suppose that our breath in prayer is lost if an answer is not received at once. But exercise of heart in prayer is never fruitless, though the result may be long delayed. 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God,' was said to Cornelius; and we know not how long he had been kept waiting before Peter was sent to him with the answer; it may have been years. (Acts x.) As in Daniel's case, so in Cornelius', and so in ours, there is a time as well as a mode of answering

which rests in the wisdom and grace of God. But so subtle is the working of unbelief that saints often pray and pray earnestly, but yet the last thing that they seem to expect is that God will grant their requests! Old Zacharias had prayed that he might have a son; so it appears from Luke i. 13. He had faith to pray, but not to believe that God would grant his prayer; for when the angel Gabriel tells him that his prayer is heard and that his wife should bear him a son, instead of rejoicing and worshipping, he asks, 'Whereby shall I know this?' But our God is very gracious; for this unbelief He chastens Zacharias with dumbness for a season, yet does not withdraw compliance with his petition. Prayer is a great reality, and we know not what unseen transactions are taking place over supplications which we suppose to have been unnoticed or unheard; but let us be assured that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. The case of Zacharias is an instance of what perhaps often occurs—that saints are in their faith and hope not up to the level of their own prayers.

But in the account of Daniel's praying, what a curtain is uplifted from unseen things! Many suppose that above this world all is good. But scripture lets us know that there are principalities, authorities, and spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies, with whom, indeed, we are in conflict (Eph. vi. 12.) Does it seem strange that wicked spirits should be there? The explanation is that there has been sin amongst spiritual creatures as well as in man, and that indeed before man existed. For we find that when only just ushered upon the platform of creation he is confronted by an insidious foe already in existence

—that old serpent, the Devil. However, man, the material being, though having sinned, has not yet been cast out of the earth, which is the home of his nature; he is still *tolerated here, though in rebellion* against God, and though he has risen up against, and crucified, the Son of God. Now heaven is the habitat of spiritual beings, as the earth is of material; and the spirits which have sinned are not yet expelled from the heavens, any more than man from the earth.\* So there are opposed beings in the angelic sphere. One of them obstructed for twenty-one days the heavenly messenger sent to Daniel. The hinderer is designated—the prince of the kingdom of Persia—while Michael, one of the chief princes, ‘is the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people,’ that is Israel (Dan. xii. 1.) But there will come a time when there will be open war in heaven, resulting in Satan’s expulsion thence with his angels, even then not receiving their final doom, which is the lake of fire, but being cast into the earth (Matt. xxv. 41; Rev. xii.) It was this event which the Lord looked forward to, and saw in prophetic vision, when He said to His disciples, ‘I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.’ (Luke x. 18.) The Seventy had returned from their mission with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us through Thy name’; and this casting out of demons from their lodgment in mankind was but an earnest of the grander dispossession which should take place when Satan and his angels should be cast out of heaven. (Rev. xii. 7-9.)

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\* That is, speaking generally. There is a class of spiritual beings who, having sinned in a special manner of wickedness, are *not* at large, but are in confinement, reserved unto the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6.)

In the meanwhile, Satan and his hosts, not yet in confinement, still ranging the heavenlies (he is the prince of the power of the air, Eph. ii. 2), are incessantly seeking to thwart the purposes of God. Man, rejecting every divine testimony, plays into Satan's hands. The believer, however, is delivered from the power of darkness (Col. i. 13), is no longer under Satan's authority, as once he was; but being, on the contrary, associated with Christ, he becomes the object of Satan's antagonism. The Christian's eyes are opened to the astounding fact that on the platform of this world a war is in progress against God; and that in this he is called to bear a part, to take a side. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies.' (Eph. vi. 12, New Trans.)

In this warfare prayer is a distinct weapon, a part of the panoply of God enumerated in Eph. vi.

*'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.'* (vers. 18, 19.)

Epaphras illustrates prayer as a mode of spiritual conflict. The Auth. Vers. says,

*'Epaphras . . . saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers.'* (Col. iv. 12.)

But the true rendering of the word 'labouring' is 'combating.' It is the same word as, in John xviii. 36, is translated 'fight'—'then would my servants fight.' Prayer, the last-mentioned piece in the panoply, is the active expression of the essential principle of the conflict, namely, dependence. Man has no strength

against Satan, and, in nature, is his willing slave ; and the Christian's resource is to lay hold upon a strength which is divine, and which alone can cope with the power of Satan. Hence the entire subject of the armour, and the believer's conflict, is introduced by laying down the foundation principle,

' Be strong *in the Lord*, and in the might of *his* strength.'

(Eph. vi. 10, New Transl.)

Man must get back to God, and to the creature's proper condition of dependence, or he remains the slave of Satan. And the saint must be genuinely cast upon the Lord in the sense of his weakness and dependence if he is to be a victor in the battle.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HINDRANCES AND HELPS

BUT besides opposition to the answering of prayer, there are hindrances to prayer itself.

#### I.

For instance, there are cases in which a person might be sick unto death, and yet in which his recovery could not be prayed for. The apostle John says :

'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin not unto death.'  
(1 John v. 16, 17.)

Upon this the first thing which many will ask will be, What is that awful sin which cannot be prayed for? Well, in the text it is indefinite. The very same act may be a thousand times more culpable in one person than another, and under one set of circumstances than in circumstances of a different character. Ananias and Sapphira told a lie ; but they did so in the face of such vivid presence of the Holy Ghost, such light and power and grace, that their lie became a sin unto death ; it acquired a peculiar enormity from the special circumstances in which the sin was committed. So Scripture does not define what may or may not be a sin unto death.

Note in passing, that CHRISTIANITY IS NOT SOCIALISTIC in the sense which modern Socialists claims it to be. There was no compulsory distribution of property; no robbing of the rich by the poor. The gift of money by those who had lands and houses, as recounted in Acts (chapters iv. and v.), was purely voluntary—the beautiful result of divine love, AN OFFERING laid at the Apostles' feet. (iv. 35.) Ananias and Sapphira were punished for their falsehood, not for withholding their property. The rights of property were distinctly upheld even in that time of extraordinary fervour. The Apostle Peter says: 'Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?'

There is, however, an underlying principle which requires to be seen, in order to the understanding of this and several similar passages in Scripture. That principle is, that the Lord is now judging in the midst of His saints; and in pursuance of that judgment inflicts chastisement—a chief form of which is sickness, and even death. Scripture furnishes a clear illustration of this in the case of the Corinthians. Not only were gross social vice and sin amongst them, but they were profaning the Supper of the Lord, treating it as a secular feast; and some were even drunken at it. The apostle, on this, tells them that those so doing were eating and drinking judgment to themselves, adding:

'For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. . . . But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.'  
(1 Cor. xi. 30, 32.)

This shews that SICKNESS AMONGST GOD'S PEOPLE STANDS UPON SPECIAL GROUND. It *may be* on account of sin,

and is thus invested with peculiar significance. The deep moral import of sickness in the church is, it is to be feared, but little seen, and less thought of. Thus illness happens to a Christian, and it is at once assumed to be a mere natural event: or, a Christian dies, cut off in the midst of his days, in the full tide of his work, which is left unfinished around him. Now it is a most solemn reflection that both of these events *may be* the direct hand of the Lord in judgment. If, however, Christians are not spiritual, they do not take a spiritual view of such happenings. Such events were occurring every day at Corinth, and their spiritual meaning was probably quite unperceived, for the saints there were far from spiritual, as Paul says, 'I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal.' (1 Cor. iii. 1.) But when God is thus moving in solemn judgment, 'it would be lack of communion to pray that such souls might live.' One led by the Spirit would surely be with God, in the necessary, though solemn, assertion of His holiness amongst His people. The language of John, however, is not absolute; he does not altogether forbid prayer, but—albeit significantly—says, 'I do not say that he shall pray for it.'

The Epistle of James also treats sickness as connected with sin; but, in cases where there is faith to ask for it, says, 'The prayer of faith shall heal the sick.'

'Is any sick among you? Let him call to [him] the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of [the] Lord: and the prayer of faith shall heal the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be one who has committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.'

(Chap. v. 14, 15, New Transl.)

The anointing with oil here, is of course, Jewish,



consistently with the general scope of the Epistle, which is addressed not to the church, but to the twelve tribes of Israel. (Chap. i. 1.)

Now these three scriptures (1 John v. ; 1 Cor. xi ; James v.) distinctly teach that sickness amongst Christians may be an infliction because of sin. If this were more recognised there would be more soul-exercise as to the purpose of God's dealings with us, and increased blessing would result.

One point should be cleared up before leaving the text in 1 John v. When the apostle says, 'There is a sin unto death,' the death he refers to is not eternal separation from God, but that temporal death of the body, which the Lord inflicts on His own as chastisement. This is made clear from 1 Cor. xi. 32, where Paul says, 'When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should *not* be condemned with the world.' God's people are judged now; the world will be judged by and bye. Contrast the case of Ananias and Sapphira already referred to, with that of Simon in the eighth of Acts. In both cases the parties sinned, and sinned deeply. Ananias and Sapphira were judged with death. But Simon was perceived to be 'in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity'; i.e., really an unchanged man, notwithstanding his nominal belief and his baptism. *He* is left to be judged with the world; while Ananias and his wife are judged now, and, awful as was their judgment, it was but temporal, and there is no reason to infer that their spirits will not be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, as in the case of another wicked person amongst Christians. (1 Cor. v. 5.)

It ought not to be supposed, however, that illness, or indeed, other afflictions, are always chastisements.

The branch that bears fruit is purged that it may bring forth more fruit. (John xv.)

And in the case of Job, the grand mistake of Job's friends was to suppose that because of his terrible affliction, he must have committed some grievous sins. God allowed Job to be afflicted with painful and humiliating ills for his ultimate blessing, and so he does with many a saint to-day. He may send sickness, bereavements, reverses, to break down the flesh, to wean us from the world, to produce brokenness of our wills, and spirituality, or to give warning to the believer where there is lack of carefulness in walk, or incipient departure from the Lord.

## II

The prayers of husband and wife may be hindered, as is taught in 1 Pet. iii. 7, which should be read thus :

'Ye husbands, likewise, dwell with them according to knowledge, as with a weaker, the female vessel, giving them honour, as also fellow-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.'  
(ver. 7.)

If the husband do not honour the wife as a co-heir of eternal life, communion in prayer must be hindered, and the effect lost of united prayer.

## III

James gives several moral hindrances to prayer. First, there is 'double mindedness'; no real godly earnestness or definiteness of purpose.

'Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.'  
(Chap. i. 5-8.)

Second, asking amiss :

'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your pleasures.' (iv. 3.)

The word 'pleasures,' given in the margin of the Auth. Vers., is correct. It is not 'lusts,' but 'pleasures'—and that not necessarily bad pleasures. What is contemplated is self-pleasing, the mere desire of the natural mind ; God's glory or our own spiritual profit not considered at all ; and God's people (see succeeding verse) living in friendship with the world, which is, spiritually, adultery.

The relation, however, to successful prayer, of the moral condition of supplicants has already been looked at under 'Promises to Prayer.'

## HELPS TO PRAYER

In connection with opposition and hindrances, let us take notice of a great and substantial *aid* to prayer, namely, thanksgiving :

'In everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God.' (Phil. iv. 6.)

'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same *with thanksgiving*.' (Col. iv. 2.)

Probably the advantage of thanksgiving *as an aid* to the soul is not fully seen. How often when the well of prayer seems dried, thanksgiving will cause the stream to flow ! The recollection of mercies received, and blessings in possession, refreshes the soul ; begets the sense that we are in communion with a giving God ; and imparts new courage to approach Him with our requests. How many answers are received to

prayers gone by, which are not recognised as answers, because in the interval the very prayers that were made are forgotten! Thus is lost to the soul opportunity for praise and thanksgiving; a loss of happy and profitable exercise; but besides that, it is a failure in what is becoming towards God. Is it a fit thing to receive a gift and not return thanks? Between man and man it is a breach of civility; and that God takes notice of such failure towards Him is certain from this case of the ten lepers. (Luke xvi. 11-19.) Only one of the ten who had been cleansed returned to give thanks, and how touching is the comment of the Lord! 'Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger!' God looks for our gratitude, and that not only in the heart, but the positive expression of it; expression too, not merely in a general way, but definitely as to instances. Praise 'is pleasant, and it is comely.' (Ps. cxlvii. 1.) A thankful soul is a happy soul. We can never get into circumstances where we have not cause for thanksgiving, and thanksgiving naturally leads to prayer.

Another aid and stimulus to prayer is *private reading*—reading God's word itself, and the valuable written ministry which in the present day He has supplied to His children so abundantly as to be within reach of all. Such reading, in a proper spirit, begets prayer. It awakes the sense of need, encourages confidence towards God, leading to prayer, with blessing as the consequence. In the word, God is speaking to us; in prayer we are speaking to Him—in both together, the circle of communion with God is completed. Neither will do without the other.

The Christian who prays without the word tends to become mystic. He who reads much without a corresponding measure of prayer, will get his head stocked with barren knowledge, but his soul will be shrivelled.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PRAYER-MEETING

CHRISTIAN, you perhaps think little of your prayers. God does not. Cornelius was a man devout and prayerful. He 'prayed to God alway'; but, while praying on in patience, probably little thought that one day an angel would be sent to tell him,

'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.'  
(Acts x. 2-4.)

But if you wish God's estimate of His people's prayers, see Rev. v. 8:

'The four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.'

That is what they are. Golden bowls contain them; they are as the fragrance of incense before the throne of God. Think of a prayer-meeting! Could the exercises of the saints be made visible you would see the odours ascending to God's presence. The room and the surroundings may be mean, but if the hearts are full of Christ, St Peter's at Rome, with all its grandeur, can present nothing so fine. Those humblings of soul in prayer; those addresses of faith to God; the workings of hearts inwrought by the Spirit Himself, though invisible, are momentous: they are fraught with consequences which reach forth

into eternity. Such is real prayer. Who that could be present would be absent from such a scene, and lose the privilege of a part in its activities?

It is possible that some, and that even amongst instructed Christians, have not quite a correct sense of the rank of the prayer-meeting, regarding it as rather subordinate. Many who would feel condemned in their conscience at absence from the Lord's Supper look upon attendance at the prayer-meeting as optional. But they have not noticed that the promise to be with two or three gathered to His name is, in scripture, specifically attached to prayer. Often as that promise is quoted, its connection with prayer and the prayer-meeting is almost overlooked. But verse 20 of Matt. xviii. is really the validating principle of verses 18 and 19. Thus:—

18. 'Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'
19. 'Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.'
20. 'FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER TO MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM.'

On this let us note that:—

1. The promise about agreeing in prayer is linked by the conjunction 'For' with the presence of Christ in the midst of two or three. It therefore does not relate, as often supposed, to an agreement of two isolated Christians to pray about a mutual subject when apart from each other. The common application really diverts the scripture from its specific object, which is to affirm the special honour and efficacy attached to *united* prayer. It applies to two or three gathered together to Christ's name, and if they, though only two, are in real spiritual agreement

in which they approach the Father, their prayer is successful. (verse 19.)

2. The Lord, therefore, is in the midst at the prayer-meeting as well as at the breaking of bread. Important fact! Possibly my reader has not looked at the prayer-meeting in this light. Many esteem it as merely a means of spiritual comfort and communion, one of many ways of gaining profit to our souls; and therefore omit attending it or not, as they are disposed. But the Lord is there! Were the Prince of Wales announced to be at a meeting in London, what activity would be displayed, what effort to be present! The subject-matter would, by the very fact, acquire a new importance. Persons who would not have troubled about attending, are now found quite zealous, and see a significance in the subject which they never saw before. But what is prince or king to the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is present with the gathering to His Name?

3. In this view, the prayer-meeting ranks as an Assembly-meeting of the first order, second only to the Lord's Supper. So it is placed, in the divine record of what characterised the first company of the church.

'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.' (Acts ii. 42.)

At a lecture, a gospel-preaching, etc., the Lord may be with His servant who speaks His word, and all present may share the blessing; but He is not with the company, even if consisting of saints, in exactly the sense in which He is with an assembly of only two or three simply gathered together unto His Name.

4. This presence of the Lord both in the prayer-meeting as well as other meetings, is a matter about



which many are obscure. Some confuse it with the presence of the Holy Ghost—but that is a different thing. The Holy Ghost does dwell in the assembly, as well as in the body of each individual believer.\* He does so permanently. But what is stated in Matt. xviii. 20 is not a permanent indwelling. It is a presence under conditions, namely, two or three being there, and they being gathered to His Name. Further, it is the presence of the Lord Himself that is guaranteed. 'But,' it will be said, 'Jesus is in heaven.' Yes, corporeally He is there—blessed be His Name!—but divinely He is with us here. He is the One who could say even in His days upon earth, 'The Son of man which is in heaven.' (John iii. 13.) And if He was divinely in heaven while corporeally on earth; so now He is divinely with the two or three on earth, though corporeally in heaven.

This draws out the specific affections of the saints for Himself. For as there are distinct persons in the Godhead, so the new nature in us has feelings and affections appropriate to each. When we think of THE FATHER, we think of the infinite, uncaused, love in which He gave the Son for us. We think of the One who has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father! who Himself loveth us because we have loved Jesus, and have believed that He came out from God. And when we think of CHRIST in our midst, it is of that Person in the Godhead who became incarnate; who so loved us as to give Himself for us, who loved us unto death. THE HOLY GHOST present with us indeed gives us the spiritual apprehension of all this. He brings before

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\* John xiv. 16; Eph. ii. 22; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; Heb. i. 13, 14.

our souls the things of Christ. (John xvi. 13-15), but THE PERSON IN OUR MIDST is the One who died for us. He, though waiting on the Father's throne, still so yearns over those whom He purchased with His blood, that where, in any quarter or corner of the globe, two or three are gathered to His Name, there is He in the midst. Would the Christian willingly be absent when the Lord is present? In this matter have we not sinned through lack of thought, or non-apprehension of what the prayer-meeting is really?

### LONG PRAYERS

The prayer-meeting needs to be elevated to its true level: it has been rather belittled. It is not a private meeting; nor a meeting for select ones more especially charged with church-responsibility. The prayer-meeting is for all: it is, or should be, THE ASSEMBLY'S EXPRESSION OF ITS DEPENDENCE UPON GOD, and its need for His help. And if the great underlying principle of the Presence in the midst of the Lord Himself received due weight, many trying matters of practice and detail would fall into their due place.

For instance, there is not a greater cause of 'deadness' in the meeting than long prayers. Of course no rule can be made; and some may say: Do we not profess to be guided by the Holy Spirit? Most truly we do: but God has given us a spirit of sound judgment. (2 Tim. i. 7.) And in the Epistle, which pre-eminently gives the Spirit's operation in the assembled saints, we find a practical rule that the prophets were to 'speak two or three.' (1 Cor. xiv. 29.) A man might say that the Spirit led him; but

the Spirit in the Assembly is not a blind uncontrollable power, but coincides with moral order; and however much a man may think he is led by the Spirit, he must, if three have spoken, bow to the practical rule which the Spirit has given by Paul—'two or three.' Judging by analogy then, if the saints have met for an hour or so of prayer, it would not be according to moral propriety, for one person to monopolise a large part of the time, selfishly ignoring that there may be others present whose exercises may be just as important as his own, but who by the egotism of one may be shut out from a part in the meeting. Some persons possess by nature a fluent verbosity which seems delightful to themselves, but is nauseous to their neighbours: once well started, their ready phrases range from Genesis to Revelation, commenting garrulously on the entire scheme of redemption and providence, but in these utterances, the element of prayer is only a negligible quantity. Such performances are a weariness to the meeting, and may unconsciously influence saints, say, at the end of a tiring day—towards remaining at home (however wrongly) when otherwise they might go with cheerful hearts to the place where prayer—simple and genuine—is wont to be made.

This matter of LONG PRAYERS is of more importance than might be supposed. The practice of having short prayers lately led, in Foreign parts, to quite an awakening in connection with the Lord's work. One writes :

I let you know how the Lord has visited His people lately. A month ago, I was in——— and saw how the Lord rejoiced His people through many short prayers and praises, and through this came new joy and strength in the meeting.

Another with reference to a different place, bears similar testimony, viz. :

I visited———where the Lord greatly comforted me in the midst of the dear brethren, through their short prayers and praises with spiritual joy—and this I found in nearly all the meetings which I visited : it has caused a general awakening.

Short prayers and praises beget a happy liberty. They increase interest all around, and the prayer-meeting becomes a profitable occasion, in which saints feel that they have really enjoyed drawing near to God. As a wet blanket to a commencing fire, so are long dismal droning prayers to the rising fervour of a prayer-meeting.

This it may be said is detail. Such detail however may be wholesome and necessary, in order that conscience may be reached : for, do we not know, how readily abstract principle may be assented to, while in practice it is ignored? True it is, that if the magnitude is at all apprehended of the principle of the Lord's presence in the midst, all detail would sink into its proper place. If a sense of this rested upon our spirits, with what reverence should we move and act. The flesh, with its verbosity and all else, would be withered up, while the most timid would feel sure of acceptance and encouragement for the faintest genuine utterance in prayer.

## CHAPTER X

### INDIVIDUAL PRAYER

SCARCELY less important than united, is individual prayer. It holds a remarkable place in the divine actings in the world. Abraham prayed for the cities of the plain—a beautiful model of reverential yet earnest pleading with God.

‘But Abraham stood yet before Jehovah. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ (Gen. xviii. 22, 25.)

As a consequence of his intercession he obtains the promise that the city should be spared if only ten righteous were found in it, and though that number was not found, Jehovah accedes to His servant’s plea for the righteous who might be there, and so the safety of Lot is secured before ever judgment is allowed to descend upon the city. Again, to the king of Gerar it is announced, as a divine favour, that Abraham should pray for him. (Gen. xx. 7.) Indeed

this intercessory prayer is an important piece in the machinery of God's proceedings.

Daniel was qualified for intercessory prayer by the purity of his own ways. He is one of three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, whom Jehovah Himself distinguished as eminent in righteousness. (Ezek. xiv. 14.) The testimony of his enemies was, 'We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.' (Dan. vi. 4, 5); and, in a foreign land, amidst foes and snares, *his practice was to pray.*

'He kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God.' (Ver. 10.)

How precious are the exercises of such a soul! No cloud in his own relationship with God—he is free to intercede for the state of God's people—a type in this of the great Intercessor. Hence we have the prayer and confession of Dan. ix. :

'I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayers and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes; and I prayed unto Jehovah my God, and made my confession and said, etc. (Vers. 3, 4.)

It is interesting to see that Daniel was heard as soon as he set himself to pray, although his prayer was not answered for some time afterwards.

'Fear not Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.' (Chap. x. 12.)

So another testifies: 'I cried unto Jehovah with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill.' (Ps. iii. 4.) Again, 'I sought Jehovah, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.' (Ps. xxxiv. 4.)

Fellow-believer, the same is our privilege! Such is 'the boldness' we have towards Him, that

'If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.'  
(1 John v. 14.)

This involves brokenness of our own wills, spirituality; without which our thoughts and feelings do not move in the line of His will. There has been One who could say, without limitation, 'FATHER . . . THOU HEAREST ME ALWAYS.' (John xi. 41, 42.)

But Daniel's prayer, in the ninth chapter of his book, and Abraham's prayer, though individual, were in a certain sense public. That is to say, they were not about the personal path or affairs of either Daniel or Abraham. Their subject matter was public. Daniel's prayer had reference to the fallen state of Israel as God's people, and to God's interests as bound up with them. Likewise Abraham's prayer was not about his own wants. He was secure from the judgments about to fall upon the wicked, but he pleads earnestly for the righteous who were intermingled with them and in danger of sharing their judgment. So, too, as to Paul's prayers in Ephesians, chapters i., iii. They were individual prayers, but their scope and object were God's glory and Christ's interests in the church. This is a high order of prayer: that is, where a servant of the Lord is abstracted from private or individual needs, and is earnestly concerned about Christ's interests in His people. Indeed, Paul's prayers for the saints in Ephesians i. and iii. were a re-production in his measure of the prayer and desires of the Lord Himself in John xvii.

But there is another field and class of prayer equally divine in authorisation, but which though not so lofty

in scope, is more tender; has to do with smaller and more human, or everyday concerns. For the believer is privileged to have communion with God about the whole of his private and personal affairs. Thus:

'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'

Luke xii. 6, 7.

'Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus.'

Phil. iv. 6.

'Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.'

1 Pet. v. 7.

Now, many Christians have a feeling that it is scarcely legitimate to expect that God would condescend to the small and petty affairs of our life. As in the case of some great dignitary amongst men, they feel as though they could not presume to trouble Him with their personal concerns. The thought may not be quite definite, and they would shrink from expressing it. But it lingers in the mind sufficiently to create hesitation and doubtfulness in prayer. It is important, therefore, to see that we have in these scriptures ample warrant for regarding the whole interior of the life of a Christian, as under the purview of our God and Father. Is some item too small to be brought to Him in prayer? Is it too purely personal, too exclusively our own, for Him to consider? What stronger expression could the Lord employ to disabuse us of the notion, and to encourage confidence, than that the very hairs of our head are all numbered? Have we the feeling that some things we can take to God, but that some things we cannot? The Scripture says, '*In every thing* by prayer and



supplication.' Have we a request, as to which we have no strong confidence that it is according to His mind? Well, we can at least make it known to God, and the result for our souls when we leave it with Him will be 'peace'—the request being submissively laid before Him, His peace will keep both heart and mind through Christ Jesus, and we can then be content, whether we have our petition or not.

It may be that we are in circumstances which our own wrong-doing has brought us into, and that we justly dread the consequences. Even that we can take to God, if we have sincerely confessed our sin; and then, all the anxiety of it, all the care, we may cast upon Him—'casting *all* your care upon him, for he careth for you.' The case of Jacob and Esau is an illustration of how God can, and will, turn for us, dreaded events into blessing, when we in brokenness wait upon Him. Jacob had deeply wronged Esau, and now, after years of separation, he has to face him; the brothers are about to meet. (Gen. xxxii.) Jacob's conscience naturally makes him feel the resentment of Esau, who, he learns is coming to meet him with four hundred men. But he lays it before God in prayer (ver. 11), with the marvellous result that the man whose vengeance he feared, 'ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept'!

Thus God is the refuge of the soul at all times. Blessed is prayer which is the outcome of an upright walk; but even when the fruits of our evil doings are springing up, yet if we are the Lord's, and have truly judged the evil of our ways, we may safely leave, in peace, all consequences to Him.

Individual, secret prayer and communion with God, constitute the foundation of all godliness. Neither the prayer-meeting nor the Lord's service is a substitute for them. They are THE SAFEGUARD OF THE SOUL ; WHERE THEY FAIL, A FALL IS NOT FAR OFF.

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